

In the Claims:

1. (Canceled)
2. (Canceled)
3. (Previously Presented) A method of image watermark decoding in a printing or scanning process comprising:
 - intercepting portions of an image as the portions pass from one stage of the printing or scanning process to another;
 - performing a watermark decoding operation on at least certain of said portions; and
 - providing a result of the decoding operation before the printing or scanning process has completed for the image;
 - wherein the watermark decoding operation is performed in a driver executing in a computer as an image is being passed between an application program and a printer or scanner through the driver.
4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 3 wherein the ~~printer~~ driver includes 16 bit code, the watermark operation is implemented in 32 bit code, and the watermark operation is invoked from the 16 bit code through an application programming interface of the 32 bit code.
5. (Original) The method of claim 4 wherein the 16 bit code passes image data to the 32 bit code over a 16 to 32 bit bridge, and the bridge includes code enabling the 32 bit code to access data structures in the 16 bit code.
6. (Previously Presented) A method of image watermark decoding in a printing or scanning process comprising:
 - intercepting portions of an image as the portions pass from one stage of the printing or scanning process to another;

performing a watermark decoding operation on at least certain of said portions, the watermark decoding being operable to decode a watermark that has been embedded redundantly in the image and varies in the image; and

providing a result of the decoding operation before the printing or scanning process has completed for the image;

wherein the portions are buffered, and analyzed to select blocks for watermark detection operations.

7. (Original) The method of claim 6 wherein the analysis of the blocks in the buffer includes identifying potentially overlapping blocks that are likely to include a watermark signal.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6 wherein the result of the decoding operation is used to trigger an action before printing or scanning of the image is complete.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8 wherein the action includes stopping the printing or scanning of the image.

10. (Previously Presented) A method of image watermark decoding in a printing or scanning process comprising:

intercepting portions of an image as the portions pass from one stage of the printing or scanning process to another;

performing a watermark decoding operation on at least certain of said portions; and

providing a result of the decoding operation before the printing or scanning process has completed for the image;

wherein the result of the decoding operation is used to trigger an action before printing or scanning of the image is complete; and

wherein the action includes using information in the watermark to index related information about the image in a database.

11. (Original) The method of claim 8 wherein the action includes using information in the watermark to fetch a web page related to the image.

12. (Previously Presented) A computer readable medium on which is stored software for performing the method of claim 6.

13. (Previously Presented) An imaging system comprising:
a device for scanning or printing an image;
a digital watermark decoder in communication with said device for intercepting portions of an image as the portions pass from one stage of a printing or scanning process to another, for performing a watermark decoding operation on at least certain of said portions; and for providing a result of the decoding operation before the printing or scanning process has completed, the decoder including a manager for selecting blocks for watermark decoding based on an analysis of characteristics of the blocks indicating which blocks are likely to have a recoverable watermark signal.

14. (Original) The system of claim 13 including a printer peripheral in communication with a computer, and a printer driver executing in the computer and incorporating the watermark decoder.

15. (Original) The system of claim 13 including a scanner peripheral in communication with a computer, and a scanner driver executing in the computer and incorporating the watermark decoder.

16. (Canceled)

17. (Canceled)

18. (Previously Presented) A method of image watermark encoding in a printing process comprising:

intercepting portions of an image as the portions pass from one stage of a printing process to another;

performing a watermark encoding operation on at least certain of said portions, said encoding including encoding tracer data into the image in response to detecting a watermark in the image; and

providing watermarked portions of the image to a subsequent stage in the printing process.

19. (Previously Presented) A method of image watermark encoding in a printing process comprising:

intercepting portions of an image as the portions pass from one stage of a printing process to another;

performing a watermark encoding operation on at least certain of said portions, said encoding including encoding calibration data into the image, said calibration data facilitating detection of a watermark in a geometrically distorted version of the watermarked image; and

providing watermarked portions of the image to a subsequent stage in the printing process.

20. (Canceled)